United Nations

Daily Highlights

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TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Secretary-General, opening exhibit of photographs of Somalia, says international community cannot regard unbearable suffering in that country as "someone else's problem".

+ Deployment of United Nations Observer Mission to verify referendum in Eritrea recommended by Third Committee.

+ Nobel Peace Prize recipient, Rigoberta Menchu, tells Third Committee of her efforts ten years ago to draw United Nations attention to human rights situation in Guatemala; today, she says, she can speak from the rostrum as the result of better understanding.

+ Progress in implementation of El Salvador peace agreements reported by Special Representative for that country at meeting today with Secretary-General.

+ States pledge total of $140 million for 1993 UNHCR Programmes; General Assembly President calls on States to fulfil humanitarian commitments and respond to need of 18 million refugees.

+ Nicaragua asks for inclusion of additional item on General Assembly agenda entitled "International Assistance for the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Nicaragua: aftermath of the war and natural disasters".

+ Cuba protests "Cuban Democracy Act of 1992" enforced by United States, saying it "constitutes gross and unprecedented violation of United Nations Charter and of international law".

+ Chairman of Special Committee against Apartheid calls on Governments ot to support exhibition of products of South Africa's arms industry, which begins today in Johannesburg.

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Blaming the international community, as much as those who kill and loot, for the unbearable suffering in Somalia, Secretary-General Boutros

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Boutros-Ghali last night warned that the tragedy in that country could not be dismissed as "someone else's problem". Opening an exhibit of photographs entitled "Somalia's Cry", presented by Time-Warner, Inc. in cooperation with the United Nations, he called for action. Only the World Organization, with the support of all peoples and Governments, he said, could organize the reconstruction effort of such magnitude.

The Secretary-General outlined the efforts underway in Somalia and the problems that had been encountered. Lack of security had prevented substantial delivery of increased assistance, he said. This problem was compounded by the lack of central authority to negotiate the deployment of additional security guards throughout Somalia. With more security guards deployed in the capital and rural areas, the 100-day United Nations plan aimed at speeding up assistance to that country could be implemented to bring massive food aid, blankets, clothes, water and materials for shelter, he stressed.

The world could not afford to be indifferent or inward-looking, he said and Governments and the media could not afford to pick a favourite foreign crisis while ignoring others. "Suffering is indivisible. Every atrocity has the same moral weight," he added. "Our own lives would not escape the effects if we ignored that".

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The General Assembly would request the Secretary-General to arrange the deployment of an observer mission in Eritrea to verify a national referendum scheduled to take place there in April 1993, under the terms of a draft resolution approved by the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) yesterday.

The mission -- the United Nations Observer Mission to Verify the Referendum in Eritrea (UNOVER) -- would monitor all activities related to the referendum, including registration of voters, organization of the poll, the campaign and the computation of results. It would consist of 21 international staff, increasing to 120 during the actual polling next year, and would cost an estimated $3 million.

The right of the Eritrean people to determine their future through an internationally-supervised referendum was recognized by all the relevant political parties at the Conference on Peace and Democracy, which assembled in Addis Ababa in July 1991.

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The 1992 Nobel Peace Prize recipient, Rigoberta Menchu, today told the Assembly's Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) that she was proud, as a Quiche, a Guatemalan and a woman, to have stood up to repression in her region. She recalled the difficulty she experienced ten years ago when she came to the United Nations to ask the international community not to disregard the human rights situation in her country. Now she could speak from

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the rostrum, as a result of better understanding and "a bit of magic" -- her receipt of the Nobel prize.

She said that although a great deal remained to be done, the legislative work of the United Nations on human rights must continue. Unfortunately, she added, the actual protection of human rights lagged behind the legislative norms. Legislation had not trickled down to the everyday life of millions of people.

Ms. Menchu, a 33-year-old indigenous rights activist who has lived in Mexico since 1981, said the United Nations gave more positive treatment to Governments than to people who suffered from their repressive policies. Speaking as a victim herself, she pointed out that that was "a matter of serious concern to those who were victims of human rights violations". Sometimes, she added, it was enough for the Government to adopt a law, which was rarely implemented, for it to be given the benefit of the doubt.

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Iqbal Riza, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on El Salvador and Chief of the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL), reported today to the Secretary-General on the progress being accomplished in the implementation of the peace agreements and on the steps being taken by ONUSAL regarding enhanced monitoring arrangements in the coming weeks leading to the end of the cease-fire period.

The Secretary-General expressed his appreciation to Mr. Riza for his tireless efforts in overseeing the implementation of the agreements, and the way in which ONUSAL has carried out its tasks.

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Pledges totalling more than $140 million were announced at Headquarters yesterday for the 1993 programmes of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The President of the General Assembly, Stoyan Ganev of Bulgaria, told the Pledging Conference that the contributions would have a direct impact on UNHCR's operations in 1993 and on the 18 million people who depended on the Agency for protection and assistance.

While the past 12 months had seen a number of positive developments, particularly voluntary repatriations to Cambodia, South Africa and Viet Nam, the overwhelming trend had been one of mass flight, he said. In Africa, the tragedy in Somalia had caused almost 20 per cent of its population to flee into Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Yemen. In Asia, 265,000 refugees from Myanmar had flooded into neighbouring Bangladesh. While UNHCR operations in northern Iraq were virtually over, the Office was now facing the consequences of the terrible conflict in the former Yugoslavia, with more than 2 million persons displaced or under siege, Mr. Ganev said.

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The pledges were announced at a meeting of the General Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee for the Announcement of Voluntary Contributions to UNHCR. Representatives of several other Member States have promised to announce their 1993 contributions at a later date.

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Nicaragua has asked for the inclusion of an additional item on the agenda of the current session of the General Assembly entitled "International Assistance for the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Nicaragua: aftermath of the war and natural disasters".

The request was transmitted to the Secretary-General by the Nicaraguan Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Roberto Mayorga-Cortes, who in an explanatory memorandum, dated 12 November, recalled that President Violeta Barrios Chamoro had stressed during the general debate of the Assembly the urgent need for special and total cooperation from the United Nations in the economic and social reconstruction of her country. Accordingly, she had asked for "the support of the international community ... because the situation had become worse this year as a result of terrible natural disasters".
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Cuba has protested what it calls "further aggressive measures" against it taken by the United States under the "Cuban Democracy Act of 1992", which it says "constitutes a gross and unprecedented violation of the United Nations Charter and of international law, as it seeks to subordinate the sovereignty of ... Cuba".

In a letter to the Secretary-General, dated 6 November, the Cuban Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Alcibiades Hidalgo Basulto, said the Act -- whose aim, he said, was to further tighten the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States on Cuba -- provided "full confirmation" for the positions long maintained by Cuba regarding the "illegal and immoral policy of blockade and isolation practised against Cuba by the United States for over three decades.
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The Chairman of the Special Committee against Apartheid has called on Governments not to support the exhibition of products of South Africa's arms industry, which begins today in Johannesburg, and has urged Governments representatives not to attend the exhibition.

In a statement yesterday, Committee Chairman Ibrahim Gambari of Nigeria said the purpose of the arms trade fair was to promote the export of South African armaments. He recalled that the Security Council had repeatedly requested all States to refrain from importing arms, ammunition of all types and military vehicles produced in South Africa.

The exhibition - entitled Defence Exhibition of South Africa 1992 - is being held in Johannesburg from 17 to 21 November.

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